

FIRST RECORD OF THE BLUE-BILLED DUCK FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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While birdwatching at Sanderson Sewerage Works, Darwin, on 31 March, 1985, with Tony Hertog and Keith Fisher, we noticed a small diving duck in one of the ponds. On the basis of its size, shape and behaviour, we tentatively identified the bird as a Blue-billed Duck *Oxyura australis*. This identification was strengthened with the aid of a 20 x telescope. Although the bird was not in the typical adult breeding plumage with which we were familiar its general coloration corresponded with the eclipse plumage described in Frith (1968). The bird was subsequently sighted by John McKean and others, who concurred with our identification.

All observers noted the following general characteristics of the bird: low in the water, sloping bill; pin-like tail feathers which were occasionally spread and erected out of the water; dark brown body with brownish-black head and neck, and dark grey bill. According to Frith (1968: 295), Blue-billed Ducks begin their postnuptial moult in December, and 'most males have undergone it by March, though an occasional bird is still moulting in May'.

There are no known previous records of this species occurring in the Northern Territory (Storr 1977; J.L. McKean pers. comm.). The northern limit of its normal range is generally regarded as about 29° S., but Field Atlas records show a considerable number of sightings between 26° and 29° S (Blakers *et al.* 1984). The northernmost record was at Mount Isa in March 1978. Although this corresponds with the time of year at which our observation was made, Blakers *et al.* (1984) stated that there was no seasonal pattern at the edges of the species' range.

References

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